

**A REPORT CONCERNING
THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH'S
BATH HOUSE SYSTEM**

Prepared by

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING

CITY OF CHICAGO

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COMMISSIONER**

DECEMBER, 1969

The City of Chicago Public Bath House System.

Introduction:

The research data used as a basis in this report is taken from the Department of Health Reports dating from 1905 through 1923. The Department of Building's records were searched, however, accurate records are not available for the years preceeding 1920.

The first free municipal bath house and the first in the world, the Carter Harrison Bath was built in 1894⁽¹⁾ at 192 Mather Street. The residential area it served was redeveloped as an industrial area and the bath house was razed in 1918. In 1929 the last public bath house was built, it is Wilson Bath at 3225 South Racine Avenue. It remains today, and its uses have been expanded and it houses a community center with athletic facilities. The building is now known as the Wilson Community Center and provides services for the residential community that surrounds it.

There were twenty baths in operation in 1923; there are seven in operation today. Decline in attendance at all bath houses started around 1910 (that year 1,070,565 used the facilities; in 1911, 26,000 fewer attended and in 1912 attendance was off 220,363 from the high of 1910). The structures that opened before 1910 reflect the high point of the system based on services provided to these communities. It can be assumed that a shift toward bathing facilities in private homes and apartments caused this downward trend in attendance at the public bath houses.⁽²⁾

(1) Department of Health Report 1907-11, P. 216

(2) The Revised "Municipal Code of Chicago, 1905" does not include the term "bath tub" and "outdoor" water closets were permitted. The 1911 Code outlaws "outdoor" water closets and while the code did not make bath tubs mandatory within the dwelling unit, plumbing, ventilation, lighting, and room regulations were in effect controlling the placement of new bath tubs.

The public baths that remain today reflect the growth of the system. The structures fall into classifications: those built before 1910 and those built later. Those built before 1910 are Waller, Ogden, Medill, and Pilsen (see Report of the Department of Health, 1907-1911, p. 218). These buildings were constructed on residential lots (25' x 125') as integral parts of residential neighborhoods. The building housed shower facilities, a boiler room, and a bath keeper's apartment on the second floor. The architecture of the building is undistinguished; existing records and the buildings themselves do not indicate that any outstanding artisans were used. The buildings were conceived as secondary service structures, and elaborate efforts of monumental architectural effects were not wasted on them.

Those three remaining structures that were built after 1910 are Lincoln, Kedzie, and Wilson. These are all larger and occupy larger sites. Their exteriors employ a highly modified Roman style of architecture. The interiors have no distinguishing architectural features other than a larger floor plan; a large open hall is a major feature of the plan of all three.

Recommendations:

The criteria for selection of a Chicago historical or architectural landmark is that it fit into one or more of the categories listed in the ordinance. The bath house system represents an era of social enlightenment that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. More specifically it represents the City of Chicago Health Department's ability to provide a necessary service that was unavailable to large segments of the population. The bath house system is a tangible representation of social services for the common citizen at that time. Today none of them are important

for their original use and as present trends continue none of these buildings will be necessary as bath houses; Suitable reuse should be found for those that are in residential areas. Others will vanish as a result of neighborhood redevelopment, most of them already have.

The Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks is authorized to explore the eligibility of a segment of the bath house system unders its legislation in section 16, Chapter 21-64

"(b)The Commission shall familiarize itself with areas, places, buildings, structures, works of art and other similar objects within the City of Chicago which may be eligible for said special designation by ordinance, and maintain a register thereof. In making its recommendation to the City Council for said special designation, the Commission shall consider the following criteria concerning such area, place, building, structure, work of art and other similar object:

4. Its exemplification of the cultural, economic, social or historic heritage of the City of Chicago."

The buildings that make up the Bath House system are a part of the social heritage of Chicago. If one bath house is to be kept to represent the history of the system its selection should be based on the following:

1. The selected structure should be one that represents the period during its height (the building should have existed before 1910).
2. The surrounding community should be residential to reflect the planning principles that were originally exercised in placing the structure.
3. The identification of the system with a person or persons who have significantly contributed to the culture, and development of the City of Chicago.

Chicago Park District Bath Houses.

<u>EXISTING BATH HOUSES</u>	<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>DATE OF OPENING</u>	<u>ARCHITECT</u>
Robert A. Waller	19 So. Peoria St.	1901 (1)	(*)
William B. Ogden	3346-48 Emerald Ave.	1906 (1)	(*)
Joseph M. Medill	2138-40 Grand Ave.	1906 (1)	(*)
Pilsen	1849 Throop St.	1908 (1)	(*)
Kedzie Avenue Bath	2401 S. Kedzie Ave.	1918 (2)	(*)
Lincoln Street Bath	1019 N. Wolcott	1918 (2) (3)	C.W. Kollac
Wilson			

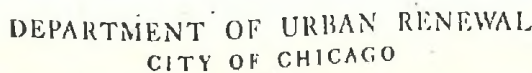
(*) Data unavailable in City of Chicago Building Department Records.

(1) Report of the Department of Health, City of Chicago. 1907 through 1910, p. 217, 218.

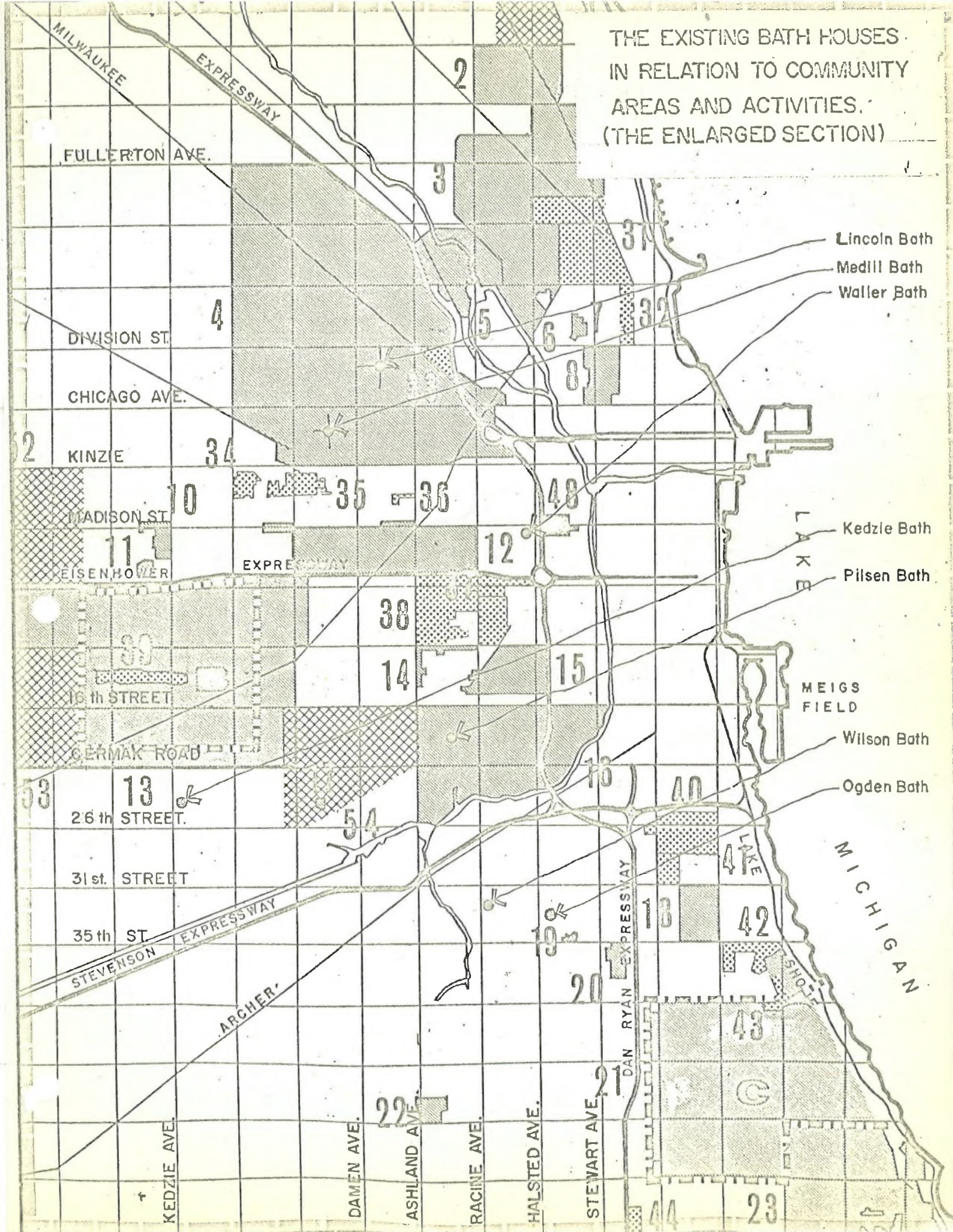
(2) Report of the Department of Health, City of Chicago. 1911-through 1918, p. 1069.

(3) City of Chicago Building Department Records.

See the enlarged section



THE EXISTING BATH HOUSES
IN RELATION TO COMMUNITY
AREAS AND ACTIVITIES.
(THE ENLARGED SECTION)



Robert A. Waller Bath House
19 South Peoria
Built: 1901

The facility is the oldest existing bath house and was one of the busiest through 1910; today it is the least used of the seven remaining bath houses. Attendance in 1968 was 4,267 people.

1. Structural Condition:

The interior of the building has been heavily modernized and the front facade window system has been replaced with contemporary sash. The building is one of the group in the system that was built before 1910 and contains only shower facilities, service rooms and a second floor apartment. The building will not readily adjust to any productive reuse function because of its unique floor plan and small size.

2. The Adjoining Community.

The area Waller Bath House serves is west of the loop. The area is in various stages of redevelopment as high density quality commercial and institutional area. The projects that are changing character of the community are: Gateway Center, the University of Illinois Chicago Circle Campus, Crane Junior College and the proposed Madison-Canal Urban Renewal Project and related private development. The facility will be of little value to the redeveloped area.

3. Reuse as a Historic Structure.

Waller would have little reuse as a historic structure in the redeveloped community. At best it might be closed and considered as a small detail placed in a park that would remind the people in the area of the community's past. The building is a simple two floor, substantially altered domestic structure which does not have enough architectural character to serve in the same capacity as other buildings serving this role in the city such as The Old Chicago Water Tower or Hull House at the University of Illinois Chicago Circle Campus.

4. Robert A. Waller for whom the facility was named was a real estate developer, a Lincoln Park Commissioner, a Columbian Exposition Board member and the Commissioner of Civil Service.



19

23

27'

12 1/2

12 1/2

R. A. WALLER

1/8



PUBLIC BATHS

12

Pilsen Public Bath House
1849 South Throop Street
Built: 1908

The facility is one of the oldest existing bath houses in the City of Chicago. Attendance in 1968 was 5,716.

1. Structural Condition.

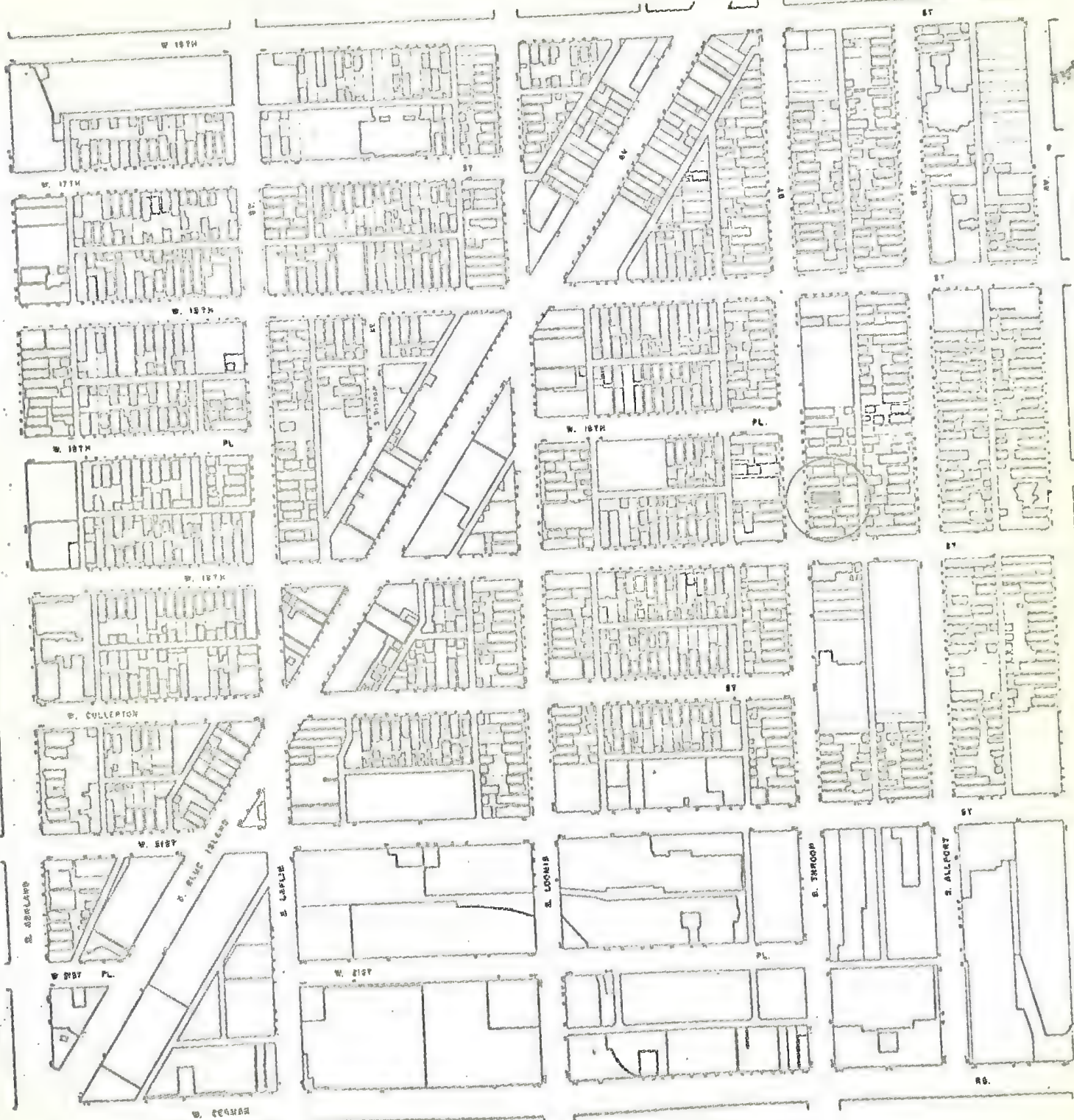
The building is similar to the other remaining bath houses built before 1910. The structure contains showers, service areas and an apartment on the second floor. The building is of brick bearing wall and frame construction.

2. The Adjoining Community.

The residential area that Pilsen Bath House serves is a City of Chicago Neighborhood Development Program Area. Substantial change will arise as a result of this program which will make this facility functionally as well as visually obsolete within the neighborhood.

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RECORDED BY BUREAU OF RECORDS, 100 PLYMOUTH ST.

PILSEN PUBLIC BATH HOUSE

1849 South Throop Street

Built: 1908

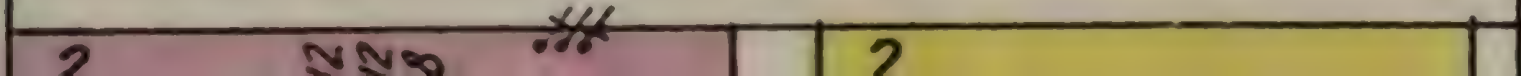
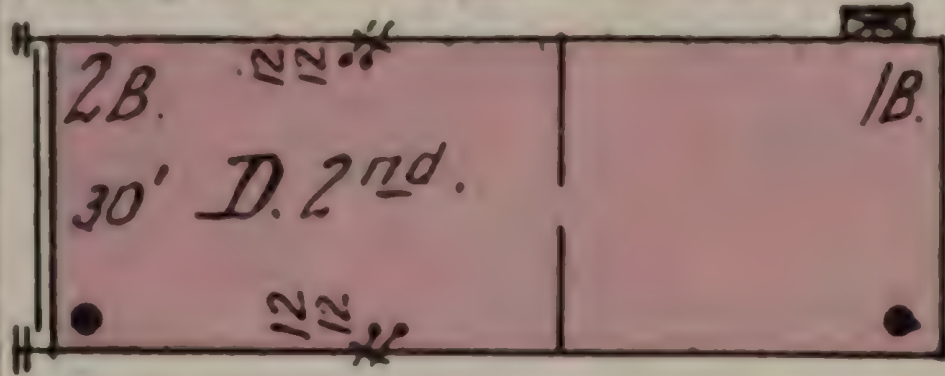
Present Zoning: R-4

S.W. 1/4 SEC. 20.39.1

(658)

1851 1829

PILSEN PUBLIC BATH HO.



Joseph M. Medill Bath House
2138 West Grand Avenue
Built: 1906

The facility is the oldest existing bath house in the City of Chicago.
Attendance in 1968 was 7,053 people.

1. Structural Condition:

The building is similar to the other remaining bath houses built before 1910. The structure contains showers, service rooms and a second floor apartment. The building is of domestic construction of brick bearing wall and frame construction. The structure will not adjust readily to any new public use because of its unique floor plan and its original small size.

2. The Adjoining Community.

The area which the Medill Bath House serves is being redeveloped predominantly as an industrial and manufacturing zone. The area will continue to redevelop industrially because of the new expressway facilities and existing railroad corridor which have created adequate access for commercial transportation.

3. Joseph M. Medill for whom the facility was named was the Mayor of the City of Chicago during the Chicago fire and later the publisher of the Chicago Tribune.

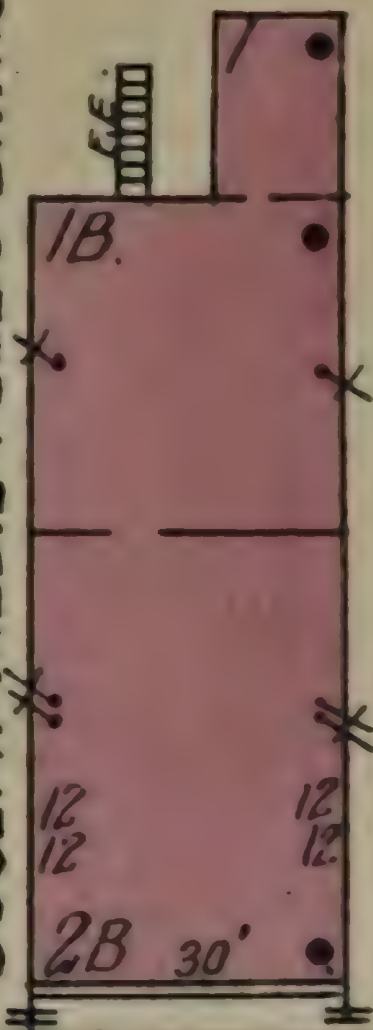


JOSEPH MEDILL
PUBLIC BATH



Present Zoning: MI-2.

JOSEPH MEDIL PUBLIC BATHS



2138

Lincoln Public Bath House
1819 North Wolcott
Built: 1918

The building was one of the last built by the Board of Health. Attendance in 1968 was 7,734.

1. Structural Condition.

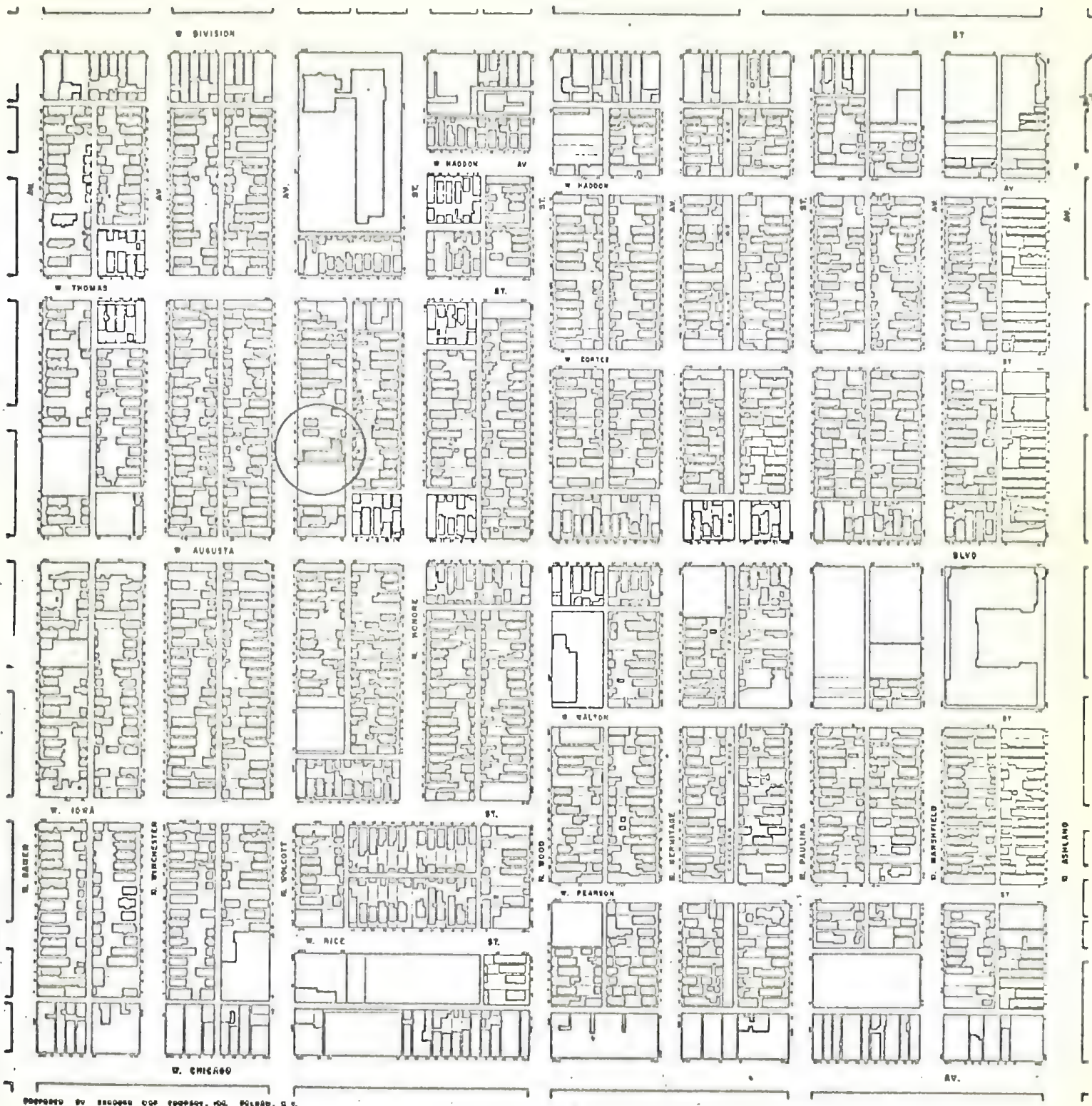
The building is a well maintained of brick bearing wall structure. The building's plan is like the two other existing bath houses built after 1910. It has a large hall in addition to the shower and service areas. The site plan is well designed and executed. A large fenced green area with trees is to the north of the building.

2. The Adjoining Community.

The area the building serves is a stable residential community. The bath house does not appear to conform to articles four (4) of the Landmark Legislation to a degree warranting its designation. The Department of Health Bath House System can be better exemplified by an older facility built before 1910 when the bath house facilities were more critical to the well being of the population.

This building and its site will be studied with a goal of expanding the services to meet contemporary community needs.





LINCOLN PUBLIC BATH HOUSE

1019 North Wolcott Avenue

Built: 1918

Present Zoning: R-4

Kedzie Public Bath House
2401 South Kedzie Avenue
Built: 1918

The building was one of the last built by the Board of Health. Attendance in 1968 was 8, 389.

1. Structural Condition.

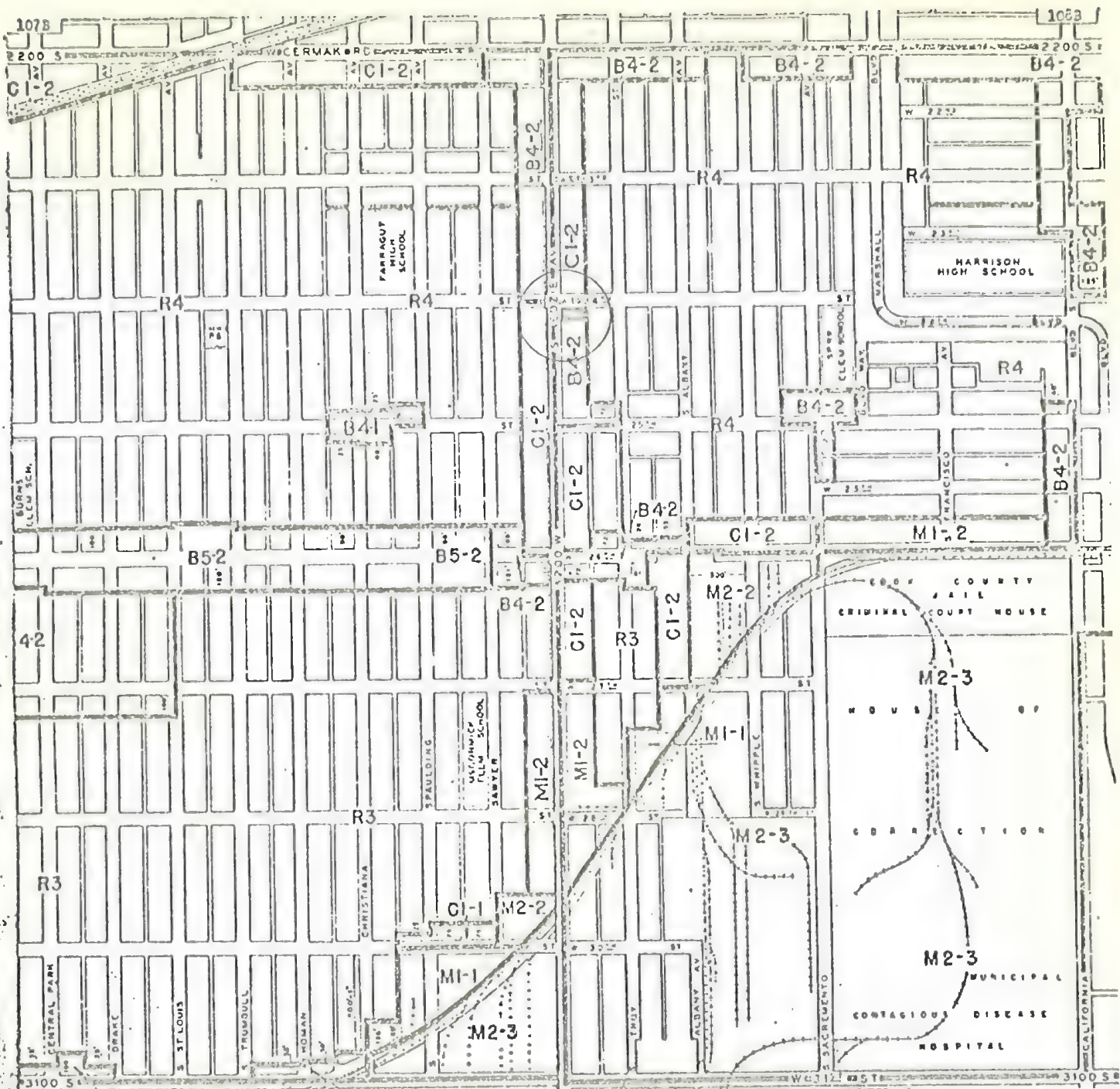
The building is a well maintained brick bearing wall structure. The building's plan is like the two other existing bath houses built after 1910. It has a large hall in addition to the showers and service areas. The building is sited on a large corner lot and has two main entrances.

2. The Adjoining Community.

The area the building serves is a large residential community to the east and west. However, the building is located in a commercial zone that does not reflect the character of the community it serves.

The Kedzie Public Bath House does not appear to conform to article four (4) of the Landmark legislation to a degree warranting designation. The Department of Health's Bath House System can be better exemplified by an older facility built before 1910 when the facilities were more critical to the well being of the population. This building will be studied with a goal of expanding the service to meet contemporary community needs.





KEDZIE PUBLIC BATH HOUSE

2401 South Kedzie Avenue

Built: 1918

Present zoning: B4-2 & R-4

3223 Wilson Public Bath House
~~3325~~ South Racine Avenue
Built: 1929

The building was the last bath house to be built in the City of Chicago. The building which is similar to those facilities built after 1916 has a large hall in addition to the shower and service areas. This hall has been adapted for use as a gymnasium. This new use has added to the building's usefulness to the residential community it serves. Attendance in 1968 was 8,319.

1. Structural Condition:

The building is a composite brick bearing and steel joist structure in excellent condition.

2. The Adjoining Community.

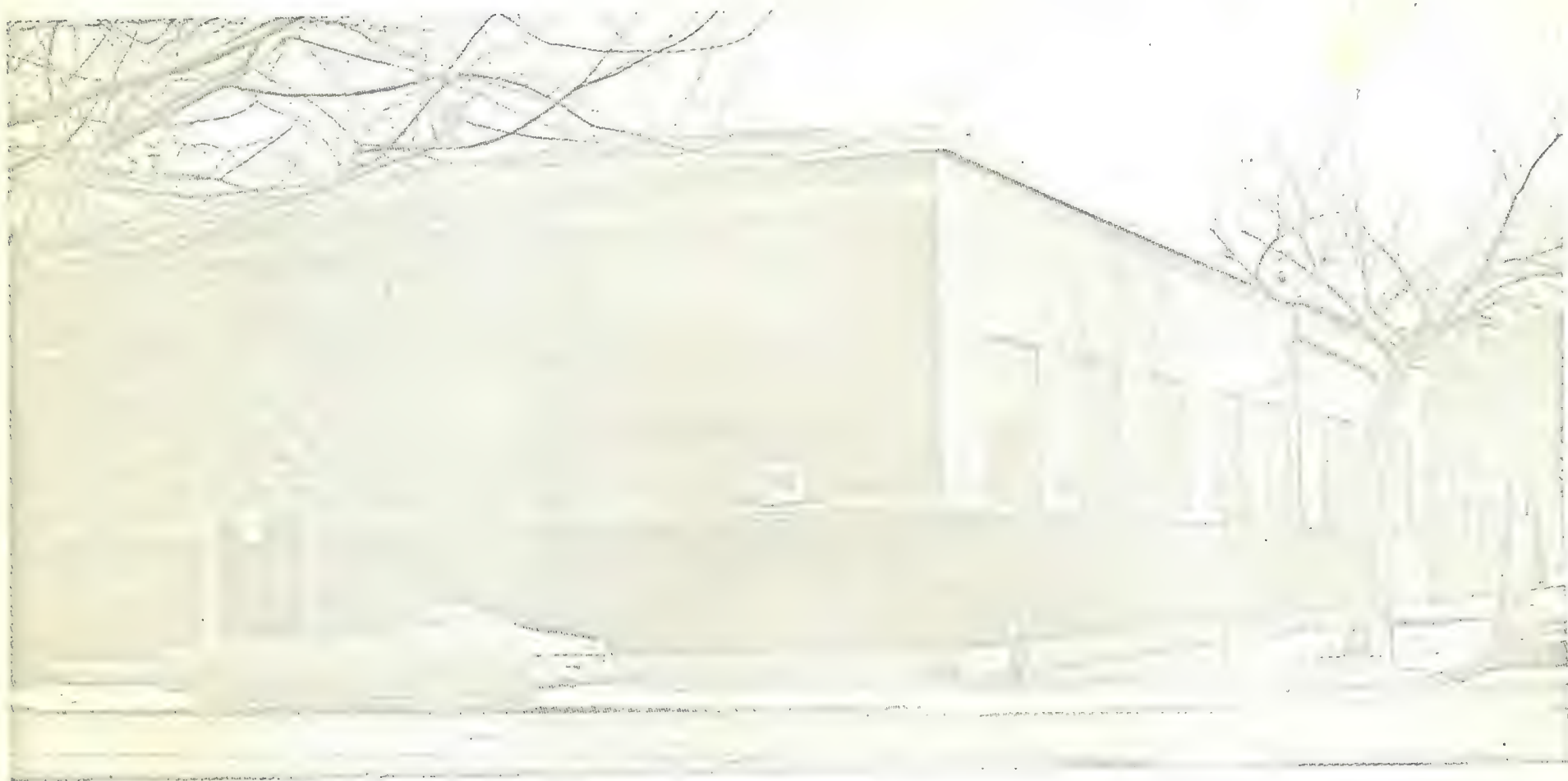
The area the building serves is a stable residential community.

The Wilson Public Bath does not appear to conform to article four (4) of the Landmark Legislation to a degree warranting its designation as a landmark. The Department of Health's Bath House System can be better exemplified by an older facility built before 1910 when the facilities were critical to the well being of the population.

This building and the program it houses will be studied to determine how its present programs might be expanded to service the community.



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WILSON PUBLIC BATH HOUSE & COMMUNITY CENTER

3325. South Racine Avenue

Built: 1929

Present Zoning: R-3

William B. Ogden Public Bath House
3346 South Emerald Avenue
Built: 1906

The facility is one of the oldest existing bath houses in the City of Chicago. Attendance in 1968 was 7,823.

1. Structural Condition.

The building is similar to the other remaining bath houses built before 1910. The structure contains showers, service areas, and an apartment on the second floor. The building is of brick bearing wall and frame construction.

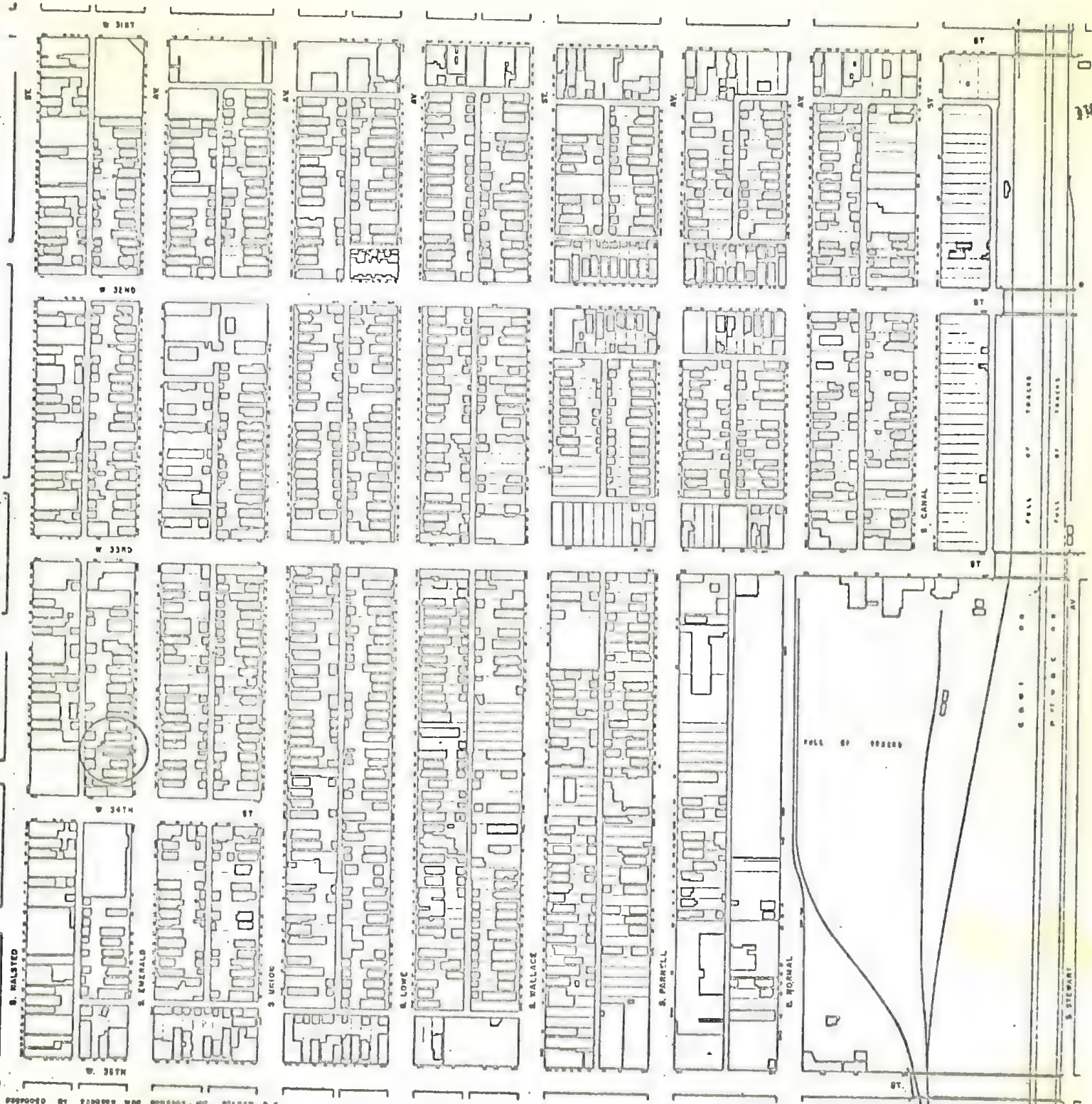
2. The Adjoining Community.

The area Ogden Bath House serves is intact. It is a residential community. The Ogden Bath House is of residential scale and can be reused for new community oriented activity if its present use should become unjustifiable. One of Chicago's famous mayors William B. Ogden is honored through the naming of this structure.

Ogden Bath House appears to be the best example representing the Board of Health's Bath House system. The bath house in its surroundings is representative of the social heritage of the City of Chicago. A study to determine how the building might best be permanently used and what is necessary to maintain this structure if it is designated as a historic landmark would be implemented.



WILLIAM B. OGDEN
PUBLIC BATH



WILLIAM B. OGDEN PUBLIC BATH

3346-48 South Emerald Avenue

Built: 1906

Present Zoning: R-3

PUBLIC BATH NO.

12 12 2
ELEC. SUB
STATION
12 12

1 1B 2B
W. GL.
SKYLIGHT
CEMENT FL.
HEAT: STEAM
LIGHTS: GAS
CEMENT FL. 1ST
30
12 12

FIRE PROOF CONSTR'N
EXCEPT IR. GIRDERS
IN ROOF

MAN ON DUTY
DAY & NIGHT

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